



Nativity of Mary

September

Adaptive Activities for Children



**National Catholic
Partnership on Disability**

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Introduction

Welcome and thank you for your ministry that serves the liturgical formation of children for their participation in the Eucharist, the “source and summit of the Christian life.” This resource is provided by the Committee on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD). It aims to offer an adaptive catechetical opportunity for all who have a heart for disability ministry to reflect on the liturgical year. We welcome you to this virtual community and hope you find this resource beneficial.

Here you will find reflections to guide children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, or diverse learners, through the current liturgical season with adaptive catechesis to help them to participate fully. Each offering includes prayer, Scripture, activities and more that incorporate the senses and take into consideration the needs of all learners. We invite you to gather children around the table of the home or the table of the classroom as preparation for their participation at the sacred table of the Eucharist.

Each monthly edition incorporates the following:

- 1. Prayer**
- 2. Sacred Scripture**
- 3. Reflection**
- 4. Faith in Action**
- 5. Activities**
- 6. Saint**
- 7. Resources/Bibliography**

Prayer

This month we will be learning about the Nativity of Mary. Mary's birth is a major feast in the Church. Mary's birth was unlike any of our births. She is our mother and we can always talk to our mother when we need advice, comfort, or support.

Leader, have persons praying with you repeat each line. The different verbiage in parenthesis can be used if it fits your audience better.

Sign of the Cross.

Dearest Mother Mary,
your conception was immaculate (without sin)
and your birth glorious.
You were conceived (created) without sin,
born without sin,
and remained sinless throughout your life.
In heaven,
you radiate the beauty and splendor of God
and will do so for all eternity (forever).
Please pray for me,
that I will more fully imitate (copy) your many virtues,
so that I can be a fitting instrument (tool)
of your Divine Son in the world.
Mother Mary, pray for me.
Jesus, I trust in you.

Amen.



Image by Ngoc Gabriel from Pexels

Reading of Sacred Scripture

Luke 1:39-56

Mary Visits Elizabeth

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

The Cantic of Mary

And Mary said:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

The Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

His mercy is from age to age
to those who fear him.

He has shown might with his arm,
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones
but lifted up the lowly.

The hungry he has filled with good things;
the rich he has sent away empty.

He has helped Israel his servant,
remembering his mercy,
according to his promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.



Frans Francken the Younger, Public domain, via
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Gospel Reflection

This month, we celebrate the Nativity of Mary, which means the day Mary was born. The Bible does not tell us the story of Mary's birth, but ancient Christian writings help us imagine more about her early life. Even without many details, the Gospels show us who Mary was: blessed among women, the Mother of God, and full of grace. In Luke's Gospel, Elizabeth says to Mary, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." But what does it really mean to be **blessed**? To be blessed means to be close to God and chosen for a special purpose. That might sound confusing, because Romans 2:11 tells us that God does not show favoritism. So, if God does not have favorites, why was Mary favored? The answer is that God loves each of us equally, but he also gives each of us a unique calling. Romans 8:28 reminds us that "all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." What this means is, God has a plan for every life—including yours. We can choose to say "yes" to that plan, or we can turn away from it.



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Mary was favored because she trusted God and said "yes" to God. When the angel Gabriel told her she would become the mother of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, Mary responded, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Because of her "yes," Mary carried Jesus, the fruit of her womb.

From our April reflection, we know that being fruitful means sharing the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Just like fruit gives nourishment to others, God wants our lives to bring goodness to the people around us. Mary carried Jesus, the source of all love and goodness within her, allowing eternal life to enter and save the world.

Mary was not only blessed and fruitful—she also trusted God and used her voice to praise him. In her **canticle**, or song of praise, Mary recognizes the goodness of the Lord through the gift of wisdom. She reminds us that God is good, even when life feels hard or things do not go the way we hoped. It can be easy to wonder, "Is God upset with me?" or "Is he punishing me?" But those thoughts can pull us away from the truth of who God is. They create doubt in our hearts and make it harder to trust his love. Mary shows us another way: to believe in God's goodness, speak it out loud, and praise him even when we do not understand everything.

What makes Mary different? As Catholics, we believe that Mary never sinned. That can be hard to imagine. Think about going through life without fighting, jealousy, selfish choices, or hurtful thoughts. Mary lived the way God originally created all of us to live: close to him and open to his grace. Like Mary, God wants us to be conduits of grace. A **conduit** is something that carries or passes something along. In a simple way, that means we are called to carry God's love and share it with others. Mary carried Jesus in her womb and continued to share his love, even when it brought her great pain during his death. We can look to Mary and to her parents, Ann and Joachim, as examples of how to listen to God, trust him, and follow his will.

How do we do this? There is a saying: "You've got to believe to receive." Luckily, God offers grace regardless of our emotions or disbelief, but that doesn't negate the fact that belief allows us to achieve more than we thought possible. Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." When we trust God and the good plans he has for us, we lack nothing. Like Mary, we can choose to believe in all that we hope for with a conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1 NRSVCE). In doing so, we get the opportunity to be closer to Christ and carry the fruit of his love.

This month, as we celebrate Mary's Nativity, or birth, we remember what a gift she is. Through her life and her "yes" to God, Mary shows us that every child is not a burden, but a gift chosen by God and part of his plan. She is a model of faith, love, and motherhood. As the first disciple of Jesus, Mary teaches us to listen to Christ and "do whatever he tells you." As Jesus was dying on the cross, he gave Mary to us as our mother, and she continues to care for us today. Just as we turn to our earthly mothers for guidance, care, and protection, we can also turn to Mary, our mother and Queen of Heaven and Earth. As we celebrate Mary's Nativity this month, may we take time to thank her for her faithful "yes," through which Christ entered the world to bring salvation to all.



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Vocabulary

- **Blessed:** a person, place, or object associated with God and implying a divine favor
- **Canticle:** a song of praise
- **Conduit:** something that is used to pass things or information to other people or places

Faith in Action

Celebrating Mary's birthday is a wonderful opportunity to begin or renew a devotion to our Blessed Mother. We can remind children that Mary is our mother in heaven and is the best example for us of how to follow Jesus. She showed us how to say "yes" to God, and that we can say "yes" to God too. Mary also modeled many virtues for us, including humility, purity, gentleness, grace, selflessness, goodness, wisdom, and charity. We can try to grow in these virtues to be more like Mary. A beautiful way to get children involved is to create an outdoor Mary Garden, or as an alternative, a small indoor Marian container garden in your home's prayer space. You could even choose to do both!

In her article, *The Legacy of Mary's Gardens: Nurturing Flora, Fauna, and Faith*, Hazel Franco explains that Mary Gardens got their origins in 7th century France, where a monk named St. Fiacre grew herbs and vegetables, and dedicated his special garden to the Virgin Mary. Later, gardeners would include plants in their Mary Garden that came to symbolize the life of Mary, her virtues, legends about Mary, and the mysteries of the rosary. The flowers and their Marian names were used to teach others about Mary and the faith. St. Bernard of Clairvaux described Mary as "the rose of charity, the lily of chastity, the violet of humility, and the golden gillyflower of heaven." Although the rose and lily have become most commonly associated with Mary, there are more than 500 flowers, herbs, and other plants that refer to Our Lady.

Some plants you might consider including in a Mary Garden are:

- **Rose:** Mary has been called "The Mystical Rose," and the word rosary comes from the Latin *rosarium*, which means "crown of roses." Different colors of roses signify different mysteries of the rosary: white stands for joy, yellow for glory, and red for sorrow.
- **Lily:** Lillies signify purity and are often associated with Mary's Immaculate Conception, being conceived without original sin.
- **Marigold** ("Mary's Gold"): In medieval times, people brought these gold flowers as an offering when they couldn't afford to bring gold coins. The golden flowers also bring to mind a crown and Mary's royalty as the Queen of Heaven and Earth.
- **Honeysuckle** ("Our Lady's Fingers"): Honeysuckle represents Mary's sweetness. The way the vines cling to trees and fences as they grow can remind us to cling to our faith throughout our lives.



Image by Himanshu Soni from unsplash



Photo by Jason Leung on Unsplash

- **Violet:** Violets grow close to the ground, and their blooms often are hidden beneath their leaves, which reminds us of Mary's humility and modesty.
- **Rosemary** ("Rose of Mary"): According to legend, while fleeing into Egypt, Mary spread the baby Jesus' clothes on a rosemary bush to dry, and its flowers turned blue in honor of Our Lady. The plant became a symbol of remembrance, because Mary never forgot God's promises. She held his words in her heart, pondering them all her life.
- **Lily of the Valley** ("Our Lady's Tears"): This flower represents Mary's tears, especially her sadness at the foot of the cross during Jesus' crucifixion.
- **Baby's Breath** ("Mary's Veil"): The airy, light texture of this plant represents Mary's purity and innocence. It also reminds us of the veil we picture Mary wearing.
- **Iris** ("Sword Lily"): The Iris represents Our Lady of Sorrows. Its leaves are said to be shaped like blades and symbolize the swords that pierced Mary's heart.
- **Petunia** ("Our Lady's Praises"): Petunias tolerate harsh conditions and tend to keep blooming even through changing weather. They symbolize Mary's steadfast faith, resilience, and the way she continually praised the Lord. Its bright blooms can remind us to be joyful in our faith like Mary.

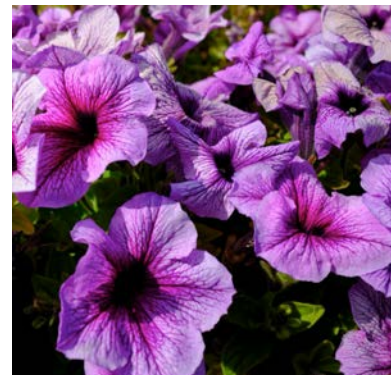


Image by Engin Akyurt from Pexels

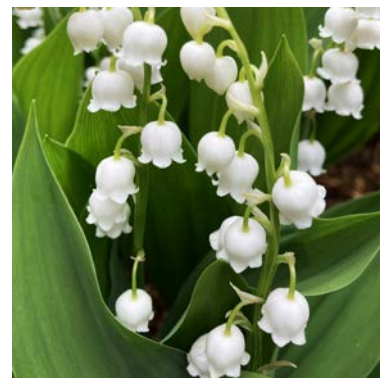


Image by Ronin from unsplash

There are many, many more choices of plants to include in a Mary Garden, and your selections will ultimately depend on your location, the amount of sun your garden receives, and how much space you have. The Marian Library at the University of Dayton houses the John Stokes Mary's Garden project (<https://udayton.edu/marianlibrary/marysgardens/stokes-marys-gardens.php>), where you can find a wealth of information about the history of Mary Gardens as well as lists of plants and their significance, and instructions for planting outdoor and indoor gardens.

How to Create a Mary Garden

Together, as a family, choose a book to read about Mary. Talk about some qualities that make Mary special and someone who we should try to imitate. Decide whether you will create an outdoor or indoor garden in her honor, and then shop for a statue of Mary to be the centerpiece of your garden. If you are creating an indoor garden, select the container that will house it. Show children pictures of some plants that grow well in your climate and that tell the

story of Mary. Perhaps each family member can choose their favorite. Discuss in simple terms the virtues or qualities of Mary that each plant will help you remember and imitate. Print Mary Garden plant labels (<https://www.looktohimandberadiant.com/2012/04/plant-mary-garden.html>) for the chosen plants and have children help color them. Lastly, plant the garden together, and keep children involved with watering, weeding, and caring for the plants. Encourage them to visit the garden often, praying a Hail Mary when they do, or simply saying “hello” to Mary and asking her to bring their prayers to God.

Whether your Mary Garden is outside or indoors, you can create a sanctuary of beauty and peace that strengthens your family’s devotion to the Blessed Mother. When we plant a special Mary Garden today, we can create a space for quiet reflection, a peaceful place to pray, and a beautiful visual reminder of the Marian virtues we can strive to grow in our lives.



Image by Mika Matin from unsplash

Activities with Children

Let's Talk: **Mary's Birthday!** Talk with your child about the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which celebrates the birth of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Just as we celebrate the birthdays of people we love, the Church celebrates Mary's birth because God had a special plan for her life.

What is the Nativity of Mary: The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the celebration of Mary's birth. Although Scripture does not tell us the exact details of her birth, the Church has celebrated Mary's nativity for many centuries. Mary's birth reminds us that God was preparing the way for Jesus and that Mary would have a very special role in God's plan of salvation.

Why is Mary's birth important: Mary's life teaches us about saying "yes" to God, trusting him, loving others, and following him. Her birth is a joyful reminder that God has a plan for each of us and that every person's life is precious and meaningful.

Discussion questions:

- Who is Mary?
- Why do you think Mary's birth was special?
- What are some things you know about Mary?
- How did Mary show love for God?
- What does it mean to say "yes" to God?
- What is something about your own life you can thank God for?
- How can we be more like Mary this month?



Ezarate, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Let's Read: This month, read Scripture passages that help us learn about Mary and her special role in God's plan. As you read, talk about how Mary trusted God and was willing to follow his plan.

- **Luke 1:26-38:** The Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel visits Mary.
 - **Luke 1:38:** Mary responds to God's plan: *"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."*
- **Luke 1:39-45:** Mary visits Elizabeth.
- **Luke 1:46-49:** Mary's prayer of praise, the Magnificat.

Let's Pray: This month, focus on thanking God for the gift of Mary and asking Mary to help us grow closer to Jesus.

Dear God, thank you for the gift of Mary. Thank you for giving her a special place in your plan. Help us to follow Mary's example by loving you, trusting you, and saying "yes" to you. Mary, pray for us and help us grow closer to Jesus. Amen.

Family Prayer Option: Pray one Hail Mary together as a family. For persons who are still learning the prayer, invite them to repeat one line at a time after an adult or older sibling(s).

Let's Create: Mary's Birthday Crown: Celebrate Mary's "birthday" with a simple crown craft! As you make the crown, talk about how Mary is often pictured wearing a crown because she is honored as Queen of Heaven. Remind children that Mary's greatest example is her love for God and her willingness to say yes to him.

Supplies:

- Blue construction paper
- White or yellow construction paper
- Scissors
- Glue or tape
- Crayons or markers
- Stickers, jewels, or other decorations
- Optional: paper flowers or real flowers found outside while on a walk finding the beauty in God's creation and nature.



Photo by Katrin Bolovtsova from Pexels

Directions:

1. Cut a strip of blue construction paper long enough to fit around your child's head.
2. Cut simple crown points along the top.
3. Decorate the crown with stars, flowers, hearts, or other pictures.
4. Write "Happy Birthday, Mary!" on the front.
5. Add the words "Yes to God!" somewhere on the crown.
6. Secure the crown with tape or glue.

Let's Cook: Mary's Blueberry Muffins: Blueberries make a fun connection to Mary because blue is traditionally associated with Mary. This is a simple recipe that children can help prepare.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup milk
- ½ cup melted butter
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1½ cups blueberries, fresh or frozen



Image by Eat Kubba from Pexels

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F.
2. In a large bowl, mix together the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt.
3. In a separate bowl, mix the milk, melted butter, egg, and vanilla.
4. Add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients and gently stir.
5. Fold in the blueberries. (During this time, you can pray a *Hail Mary* to honor Mary and thank God for the gift of Mary.)
6. Spoon the mixture into a lined muffin tin.
7. Bake for about 18–22 minutes, or until the muffins are lightly golden. (This is a good time to set up the sensory area or engage in the sensory prayer time.)
8. Let them cool before enjoying!

While you cook, talk about Mary:

- Mary was chosen by God for a very special role.
- Mary trusted God even when she didn't know everything that would happen.
- Mary **said yes** to God's plan.
- We can follow Mary's example by saying yes to God through our words and actions.

Sensory Prayer Experience: Saying "Yes" Like Mary: Create a calm sensory prayer experience focused on Mary's response to God.

Materials:

- Battery-operated candle or flashlight
- Blue or white blanket
- Picture or statue of Mary
- Soft music, if calming for your child
- Optional: artificial flowers or real flowers found outside while on a walk finding the beauty in God's creation and nature.
- Optional: sensory-friendly rosary or prayer beads

Steps:

Create a Prayer Space: Set up a quiet, comfortable area with the blanket, picture of Mary, flowers, and soft light.

Look at Mary: Invite your child to look at the picture or statue of Mary. Talk briefly about how Mary loved God and trusted him.

Practice Mary's "Yes:" Say together: *"Mary said yes to God. I can say yes to God, too."* For children who communicate nonverbally, they can point to a "YES" card, give a thumbs-up, flip a switch, sign "yes," or choose another meaningful response.

Think About Your Own "Yes:" Invite your child to think about one way they can say yes to God this week:

- Helping someone.
- Praying for someone.
- Sharing your favorite prayer with someone.
- Writing a card with your favorite prayer to give to someone you know.

Pray a Hail Mary: Pray together, allowing your child to participate in whatever way is comfortable.

Finish with Quiet Time: Spend a few quiet moments together. Invite your child to think about one thing they would like to thank God for.



Photo by Mateus Campos Felipe from Unsplash

Family Challenge: Celebrate Mary's Birthday: Celebrate the Nativity of Mary as a family by choosing one simple way to celebrate Mary's birthday:

- Pray a Hail Mary together.
- Make a birthday card for Mary.
- Make the Mary's Birthday Crown craft.
- Bring flowers to a statue or image of Mary.
- Sing a Marian hymn together.
- Visit a church and spend a few quiet minutes with Mary.
- Do something kind for someone in honor of Mary.
- Have a small family "birthday celebration" for Mary.

Family Reflection: At the end of your celebration, ask each family member: "What is one thing you admire about Mary?" Then finish by praying together: "*Mary, pray for us and help us always say yes to God. Amen.*"



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Saint for September

St. Giles

Patron Saint of persons living with a disability or who are fighting cancer

Feast Day: September 1



Hans Memling, Public domain, via Wikimedia

This month, we will learn about St. Giles, the patron saint of beggars, persons with disabilities, the poor, hermits, epilepsy, forests, lepers, and many other causes. A patron saint is a holy and virtuous person who is honored as a defender, guide, or source of inspiration for causes or groups of people.

St. Giles was believed to have been born in the Medieval era around 640AD, but the exact date of his birth is unknown. He was born in Athens, Greece to wealthy parents who died when St. Giles was likely a young man. In his youth, St. Giles often visited the cathedral and prayed in the presence of beggars. On one occasion, he was said to have given his cloak to a beggar and nourish the man with the Eucharist. As word of his kindness spread, St. Giles began to receive unwanted attention. After his parents' death, he gave away his inheritance and sought a life of seclusion, first in the wilderness near the mouth of the Rhône River, then near the Gard River, and finally in an area that later became the Diocese of Nimes.

St. Giles was a hermit, a person who lives alone, constantly praying and taking action for the reparation of sins. He was said to have lived in a cave and befriended a light-colored deer. Legend has it that a king and his huntsmen were hunting the deer and

mistakenly hit St. Giles instead. The arrow left St. Giles with permanent disability. In remorse, the king

offered to build a monastery for St. Giles and the many people who wished to learn from him. The monastery was called St. Giles Abbey, which was later converted into a parish and is managed by the Diocese of Nimes today.

St. Giles is a model of faith because he made God the center of his life. We can learn from St. Giles by caring for the poor, assisting persons with disabilities, and making God our focus. Though God doesn't expect all of us to give up our inheritance and comfortable lifestyles to follow him, we can still sacrifice our gifts and time to be closer to Christ. How can you be like St. Giles and make time for Christ today?



Master of Saint Giles, Public domain, via Wikimedia

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Children's Books:

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Mary's Colorful Garden Board Book by Little Rose Shop (<https://thelittleroseshop.com/products/marys-colorful-garden-board-book>)